

Anna's Love



*A love that bridged
time and space*

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James Davis

Foreword

This is a short story based on a story shared with me by a dying woman in 1987. I was serving as an intern in her congregation when she told me this story. From the first time I heard it, it has been a reminder of the power of love to bridge time and space.

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Life gives us rare, precious moments when the stories of people from vastly different times and places collide in ways that plunge both deeper into life's most profound truths; moments in which we are immersed in a new awareness and understanding of how deeply connected we all are; moments saturated with profound beauty and love. Anna gifted me with one of those moments.

Anna was ninety-six years old and dying of pneumonia. She was spending her last days in the care of City Hospital in New Rockford, North Dakota.

When I walked into Anna's room I expected to find a frail, old woman caught in that dream-like state that hovers between life and death, too weak to carry on a meaningful conversation. Instead, I was greeted with a tender smile glowing with peace and joy. Anna was ready to say "Goodbye" to the hardships and trials of this life and continue her voyage into the great mystery that lies beyond.

"Hi, Anna. I thought I'd stop and visit for a while this afternoon. Is this a good time?"

"Oh yes, Pastor." Anna looked directly into my eyes. "I'm so happy you came to see me. Please sit down."

"Thank you," I said as I pulled a chair close to her bed. "How are you?"

"I'm dying, Pastor," she chuckled softly. "But I'm not afraid. I'm ready to go. I look forward to being free from this old body. It has served me well, but I'm afraid it will not serve me much longer."

We spent a while talking about what it was like to grow old, to be dying, what she was grateful for and what her hopes were for the

time left. She welcomed the opportunity to talk about her life, her impending death and her unfathomable faith. I sensed no fear, only gratitude for her blessings and a very deep and profound trust in God's love and care.

While she was talking, I noticed she wore two rings on the ring finger of her left hand. One was a slightly misshapen gold ring so thin it seemed it would break at any moment. I assumed it was a wedding band. The other was a simple silver ring that appeared to be brand new.

When there was a lull in the conversation, I said, "I notice you're wearing two rings. The one looks very old while the other looks brand new."

She smiled as she looked at the rings. She was quiet for a moment. She seemed lost in a memory. "I've had to have my wedding ring repaired twice. It was always a delicate band and I've worn it through two times."

Anna had been married to Oscar for sixty-four years. He had been gone twelve years.

Another long silence followed.

"Is the silver ring a special ring?" I asked.

She smiled at me before sinking into a moment of pensive silence.

Eventually, she looked at me and smiled. "I've never told anyone about this ring. I always thought it would be something I'd take to the grave with me."

My curiosity was piqued. I returned her smile.

"You seem like such a nice young man. Do you really want to know about this ring?"

"Yes. I'm very curious, but I only want to know if you want to tell me."

"You won't tell anyone else, will you?"

“No. I won’t.” I promised. “Tell me.”

“Oh, I suppose it wouldn’t hurt to tell you.”

“Thank you.” I replied.

Anna had always spoken directly to me. Now she gazed at her ring as she spoke.

“I came to America from Norway when I was sixteen years old. I didn’t want to come, but my parents sent me because there were no opportunities in Norway. Things were very hard there. They told me I would have more opportunities in America.”

Anna paused for a moment. Then, looking at me, she continued. “There was a young man in Norway who was very special to me. His name was Gustav. Gustav was seventeen. We were in love.”

“I was heartbroken when my parents told me I had to leave for America. I didn’t want to go. I wanted to marry Gustav. But I had no choice.”

“Gustav told me not to worry, that he would find a way to come to America, that we would be married. He told me to wait for him and he would come.”

“After coming to America, I waited four years for Gustav. Finally, I received a letter from him. He told me that he loved me. That he wanted to marry me. But that I shouldn’t wait because he was afraid he would never be able to come. His father had died and his family needed him at home.”

Anna began to sob softly. “That was the worst day of my life. My heart was broken, again.”

“Two years later I married Oscar. I loved him, but it was different from the love I had for Gustav. Oscar was a good man and we had a good life. I miss him every day.”

Anna leaned back in her bed, quietly, fussing with her rings.

“Gustav gave me this ring on the last night we were together,” she

said as she showed me the silver ring. “He told me that he loved me. We kissed and held each other for the longest time. It was one of those moments when my heart was filled with love and pain at the same time.” Anna softly said, “It was the last time we were together.”

“One day after Oscar died, I was looking for a pair of earrings in my jewelry box when I came across this. I had not worn it since Oscar and I met. It just didn’t seem right to wear it anymore. I thought to myself, ‘What would it hurt for an old lady to wear a silver ring?’ I put it on that day and have never taken it off. I told my girls to bury me with what I have on right now, my wedding band and this silver ring.”

“One day Mary (one of Anna’s girls) asked me where the silver ring came from. I told her it was just something I’d had for a long time but never worn. She gave me kind of a strange look but didn’t say anything.”

“Do you think it’s wrong for me to wear it?”

Smiling, I replied “Wrong? Not at all! I think it’s beautiful.”

“I didn’t think it was wrong, but once in a while I have my doubts. I guess I’m just a crazy old lady.” We both laughed.

“I feel so blessed, Pastor. I loved and was loved by two good men. I miss them so much. I look forward to going to be with them.”

I was profoundly moved by Anna’s love for Gustav and Oscar. We were quiet for a long while. Finally, I broke the silence. “Thank you for sharing that story with me, Anna. It’s very touching.”

“You’re the only person I’ve ever told it to, Pastor. I hope I didn’t bore you.”

“Not at all!” I exclaimed. “You have given me a beautiful gift. I am so honored that you shared your story with me.”

Before leaving, I held her hands in mine as we thanked God for the

many ways in which Anna had been blessed, but especially for the blessings of her faith and the love she continued to share with Gustav and Oscar.

Long ago, a man named Paul wrote, “Love never ends.” Indeed, it never does.